


Static Shocken

By AT1(AW) Mike Medus

I was sitting in the doc's office on the ship, getting ready to go through the standard post-shock checkup. It wasn't the first time I had been through this exam after getting zapped, and any AT worth his weight in wire splices probably has been in the same situation. For the first time, however, I was mad about being shocked. This time, it wasn't my fault, or, at least, I didn't think so.

The other times the electricity bug had bitten me, I was able to step back and say, "Man was I stupid!" As I sat in the medical-examiner's chair, I began to replay the situation in my head, hoping somehow to justify my anger.

Night flight ops are dangerous enough on the flight deck of a small boy, but, from time to time, the flight-



A recovery-assist landing requires several important safety steps.



Mishap Reduction Opportunity

Aircraft-Related Electrical Shocks FY97 through FY03

The WESS-SIMS database contained 20 incidents. That number is significant, but doesn't reflect the real number because many incidents go unreported and a current hazrep backlog exists. Each of the Sailors involved in these incidents suffered minor injuries, but it could have been worse. It's critical to make sure that power is secured when connecting or disconnecting power cords; rings, watches and other jewelry are removed before working around electrical or electronic equipment; and situational awareness is maintained at all times.

Incidents by type aircraft:

P-3	9
EA-6B	3
F-14	2
FA-18	2
H-60	2
H-53	1
E-2C	1

deck crew practices what is known as a recovery-assist (RA) landing. This procedure raises the danger to a new level. An RA landing requires us to connect a cable from the bottom of the aircraft to another cable that comes up through the flight deck of the ship. When those cables are drawn tight, a hydraulic winch beneath the flight deck pulls down on the aircraft, guiding it to the flight deck in rough seas. This procedure typically is not necessary, but we often practice it to keep aircrew and flight-deck crews proficient—just in case the need ever arises.

The RA landing requires precise coordination between the aircraft and deck. As the pilot hovers over the flight deck, the aircrewman lowers the aircraft's RAST cable to the deck. At that point, two "hookup men" walk out in tandem to the center of the flight deck. The trailing person maintains a firm grip on the float coat of the leader, who carries a grounding probe. This device is a long, insulated stick with a metal hook on one end.

The trailing person holds a cable that connects to the grounding probe, and both Sailors wear two pairs of gloves: one made of leather, worn over another set made of thick rubber. Once in the center of the deck, the leader stops. This step is a cue for the trailer to connect the probe's cable to a pad eye in the flight deck. After connecting it, he tugs on the leader's coat, alerting him to ground the helo. The leader then touches the aircraft's grounding cable with the probe, which ensures that the aircraft and the ship are at the same electrostatic potential, preventing a shock hazard. They then connect the ship's cable to the aircraft cable, so the helo safely can be guided down to the flight deck.

This procedure may sound complicated to some people, but I had done this task a thousand times.

When the time came to do it again, I was ready. Unfortunately, my assistant was not as experienced, and, in fact, he never had served as a hook-up man. When I asked him to help, he said "Sure, but can you run through the procedure with me because I haven't seen it done in a while?" I quickly went through the entire procedure, and he nodded the whole time, making me believe he understood.

As the helo approached, we left the hangar and prepared for the hook up. Everything seemed OK, and we walked out onto the flight deck. I reached the center of the deck and stopped—my partner's cue to hook up the grounding cable. I felt a tug on my coat, believed the grounding cable was attached to the flight deck, and lowered the wand to ground the helo.

A few seconds later, I was being dragged off of the flight deck after static electricity zapped me. My partner had misunderstood directions when I reviewed the procedure with him. He thought the tug on my coat was a signal to let me know he was going to connect the cable.

Sitting in the doc's office, I realized the problem was mine. I could be mad only about my own actions. I mistakenly had become overconfident, which gave me a lax attitude. Because I had done this procedure so many times, I felt it would be a cake walk. I had begun this dangerous procedure without a good brief. Had I taken the extra time to run through the entire scenario, thoroughly discussed the situation with my partner, and made sure he understood. This incident could have been prevented.

After leaving medical, I felt pretty stupid about the whole situation and headed up to the hangar. I wanted to hand out a few apologies. I'm now a supervisor, and I make sure my people understand the importance of a pre-task brief before they take on any potentially dangerous job.



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